



Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

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Public Invited to Dedication of Elkhead Dam & Reservoir Enlargement in Northwest Colorado

CRAIG-Colo. -- The public is invited to participate in the dedication of the enlarged Elkhead Dam and Reservoir on July 11 at Elkhead Reservoir State Park near the city of Craig in northwest Colorado. The event is sponsored by the Colorado River Water Conservation District (Colorado River District) in cooperation with the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program). Food will be available from a Kiwanis Club fundraiser barbecue starting at 4:30 p.m. followed by a program at 6 p.m. that will include remarks by key leaders representing the State of Colorado, Recovery Program partners and the Colorado River District.

Elkhead Reservoir recently reopened for public use following a 2 ½-year closure during which the dam was enlarged to roughly double the reservoir's storage capacity to 25,000 acre-feet. The Colorado River District managed the enlargement project and funded \$17.8 million of the \$31 million cost. The Recovery Program funded the remaining \$13.2 million. The additional water will be used to meet the needs of people in the Yampa River Basin and to augment flows in the Yampa River to benefit the endangered fish.

“This project is a unique example of water development and environmental interests working together to achieve common goals,” said Bill Trampe, chairman of the Colorado River District's Board of Directors. “This type of proactive and cooperative action avoids conflicts between water users and fish recovery actions and ensures that the Recovery Program is conducted in accordance with state water law.”

The Elkhead Dam and Reservoir enlargement is one of several actions included in a management plan for the Yampa River Basin that was developed after nearly a decade of close collaboration among local, state and federal organizations, including the Yampa River Basin Partnership and other Yampa Valley residents. The plan addresses endangered species recovery and water development in the Yampa River Basin in Colorado and Wyoming and includes projected water needs in the Yampa River Basin through the year 2045.

“The completion of Elkhead Reservoir's enlargement reflects the spirit of the Recovery Program with participation and cooperation among local, state and federal organizations,” said Recovery Program Director Bob Muth. “We especially appreciate the active involvement of local citizens and city and county officials whose participation led to the completion and implementation of the Yampa River Basin management plan. Their involvement clearly demonstrates their commitment toward sound management of the Yampa River and its tributaries today and into the future.”

As the largest tributary to the Green River, the Yampa River plays an important role in the lifecycle of the endangered fish in the Upper Colorado River Basin. Designated as critical habitat downstream of Craig, Colo., the Yampa River is a year-round home to adult Colorado pikeminnows. This species spawns in the lower reaches of Yampa Canyon, which also harbors one of five remaining native populations of humpback chub in the Upper Basin. In addition to directly providing habitat, the Yampa River delivers flows and sediment downstream to the Green River, helping to maintain hundreds of miles of river habitat considered vital to the recovery of the endangered fish. The enlargement of Elkhead Reservoir provides 5,000 acre-feet of water permanently and up to 2,000 acre-feet of leased water annually to augment flows for endangered fish in the Yampa River during middle and late summer.

“The enlargement of Elkhead Reservoir is an important step toward recovery of these rare fish because it will ensure that water is available to provide the river flows and habitat the fish need to support self-sustaining populations,” said The Nature Conservancy’s Colorado Water Manager Tom Iseman. “In concert with other recovery activities, including the management of nonnative fish, these flows should contribute to the recovery of the species and the integrity of the Yampa River ecosystem. The Nature Conservancy is pleased to participate in this collaborative project, and we hope this will serve as a model for future efforts.”

On the human side of the equation, 5,000 acre-feet of water is newly available for future growth in Routt and Moffat Counties. The project also creates an improved recreational amenity for the region. Colorado State Parks and the City of Craig are building improved camping, day-use and boating facilities at the reservoir. The reservoir also serves as a sport fishery and receives nonnative sportfish removed from the Yampa River as part of efforts to recover the endangered fishes.

“The dedication of the enlarged Elkhead Dam and Reservoir is a landmark event for the State of Colorado,” said Colorado Department of Natural Resources Director Harris Sherman. “The cooperation which led to its completion will serve as a model for other projects that will help the state achieve its concurrent goals of conserving threatened and endangered species while providing for recreational fishing opportunities. In addition, the project puts in place a plan for continued development of water resources under state water law to benefit all citizens of Colorado.”

For more information on the dedication, contact the Colorado River District at 970-945-8522, ext. 226. For more information about the Recovery Program, call 303-969-7322, ext. 227, or visit: coloradoriverrecovery.fws.gov.

The Recovery Program is a voluntary, cooperative program whose purpose is to recover the endangered fishes while water development proceeds in accordance with federal and state laws and interstate compacts. For more information, call 303-969-7322, ext. 227, or coloradoriverrecovery.fws.gov.

The Colorado River District is the principal water policy and planning agency for the Colorado River Basin within the State of Colorado. For more information on the enlargement project and other issues, visit: www.ColoradoRiverDistrict.org.